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Welcome to The Intersection, Echelon Insights' newsletter about news at the crossroads of polling, data, and technology.

Comments? Questions? Tips? Don't hold back: [patrick@echeloninsights.com](mailto:patrick@echeloninsights.com).



2022

### **Eric Levitz: David Shor on Why Trump Was Good for the GOP and How Dems Can Win in 2022** (New York Magazine)

“In the United States, every season is campaign season. Four months after America last went to the polls, Democrats are still refining their autopsies of the 2020 race and already governing with an eye toward the 2022 midterms. Meanwhile, on the other side of the aisle, Republicans are trying to figure out just how firm Donald Trump's grip on their party really is — and debating whether that grip should be stronger or weaker.

To gain some insight into these matters, Intelligencer turned to our favorite socialist proponent of ruthlessly poll-driven campaigning, David Shor. A veteran of the 2012 Obama campaign, Shor is currently head of data science at OpenLabs, a progressive nonprofit. We spoke with him last week about how his analysis of the 2020 election has changed since November, what Democrats need to do to keep Congress after 2022, and why he thinks the Trump era was great for the Republican Party (in strictly electoral terms).”

### **Lee Drutman: How Much Longer Can This Era Of Political Gridlock Last?** (FiveThirtyEight)

“Democrats may have a narrow majority in both the House and the Senate for the next two years, but it's nothing near the margin they hoped for. And the likelihood that Democrats keep both the House and the Senate in 2022 are low, as the president's party almost always loses seats in the midterm elections.

That means more divided government is probably imminent, and the electoral pattern we've become all too familiar with — a pendulum swinging back and forth between unified control of government and divided government — is doomed to repeat, with increasingly dangerous consequences for our democracy.”

### **2022 Senate Forecast** (cnanalysis)

### **Stef W. Knight, Hans Nichols, and Will Chase: Republican governors loom over precarious Senate** (Axios)

“Nineteen seats in the U.S. Senate could potentially flip parties if there's an unexpected vacancy, according to Axios' analysis of state vacancy rules, which most often allow the governor to appoint a replacement.

Why it matters: Depending on the senator, a single resignation, retirement or death — by accident or old age — could flip control of the 50-50 Senate, or give Democrats a two-vote cushion.”

### **Eric Wilson: A 2022 Doomsday Scenario for Campaigners** (Campaigns & Elections)

“Some of these trends are inevitable, but perhaps the greatest challenge for political campaigns and consultants is the uncertainty, which makes committing fully to certain strategies too risky. Beyond the short-term impacts of the disruptions for political professionals, there’s potential for lasting damage to civic participation.

For campaigners, our competition is no longer restricted to the opposite party. Rather, we compete with all of the other ways voters can spend their time. If these trends persist and candidates and their allies are shut off from reaching Americans alongside the media where they consume news and information, broad segments of the American populace may no longer be civically engaged.”

## **IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

### **We're Hiring!**

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### **Emily Ekins: Why Did Republicans Outperform The Polls Again? Two Theories.** (FiveThirtyEight)

“A number of theories may offer some clues, though. For instance, one popular explanation is that pollsters’ likely voter models were off. Survey screening for likely voters may have failed to adequately gauge voter enthusiasm. Or attempts to contact inconsistent or infrequent voters — who tend to be harder to reach in surveys — may have failed in reaching those more favorable to Trump. Also, due to the pandemic, Democrats chose to limit typical methods to increase voter turnout, like door-to-door canvassing, which may have affected actual turnout. Then again, maybe the polling error was due to sampling problems. If Democrats were more likely than Republicans to stay at home during the pandemic, they would more likely be available to take surveys. Of course, it’s not necessarily an either-or situation. Both of these theories could be true (not to mention a whole host of other explanations), but it’s also possible that something bigger is at play here since the polls misfired in similar ways in both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections: Pollsters may be systematically missing certain types of Republican support.”

### **Lachlan Markay: The new grifters: outrage profiteers** (Axios)

“As Republicans lost the Senate and narrowly missed retaking the House, millions of dollars in grassroots donations were diverted to a handful of 2020 congressional campaigns challenging high-profile Democrats that, realistically, were never going to succeed.

Why it matters: Call it the outrage-industrial complex. Slick fundraising consultants market candidates contesting some of their party’s most reviled opponents. Well-meaning donors pour money into dead-end campaigns instead of competitive contests. The only winner is the consultants.

What’s happening: Four Republican House candidates who each drew less than 30% of the vote in their respective races collectively raised over \$42 million in the 2020 cycle.”

**Chuck Todd, Mark Murray, Carrie Dann, and Melissa Holzberg: Trump and the GOP made their biggest 2020 gains in these South Texas counties** (NBC News)

“What do these five Texas counties have in common?

They’re all smaller (or in some cases, tiny) counties not far from the U.S.-Mexico border where more than 9 in 10 residents are Latino. These counties also have unemployment and poverty rates well above the national average, few residents holding college degrees and in most cases, a significant majority of residents born in state.

Post-mortems have looked at how Latino voters in this region may have been influenced by Biden’s rhetoric on oil and gas or law enforcement reforms, as well as how Democrats’ in-person outreach was inadequate even before it was curtailed by the pandemic.”

**Scott Keeter, Nick Hatley, Arnold Lau and Courtney Kennedy: What 2020’s Election Poll Errors Tell Us About the Accuracy of Issue Polling**(Pew Research Center)

“Most preelection polls in 2020 overstated Joe Biden’s lead over Donald Trump in the national vote for president, and in some states incorrectly indicated that Biden would likely win or that the race would be close when it was not. These problems led some commentators to argue that “polling is irrevocably broken,” that pollsters should be ignored, or that “the polling industry is a wreck, and should be blown up.”

**Lakshya Jain: Created a regression model to analyze 2016->2020 swing based on demographics. Much of the swing in South Texas can actually be explained with education, race, urbanization, and religion when analyzing the Sunbelt.**

 **The GOP**

**Zack Stanton: The Rise of Biden Republicans** (Politico)

“For four decades now, that historic upheaval and the quest for the support of “Reagan Democrats” has defined American politics, from the rise of Bill Clinton’s “New Democrats” — which Greenberg, as Clinton’s pollster, had a central role in crafting — to George W. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism,” to Barack Obama’s poll-tested evisceration of Mitt Romney’s venture capital experience, to Donald Trump’s white-grievance mongering and tirades against NAFTA. After Obama won Macomb in 2008 and 2012, Trump captured it in both 2016 and 2020.

Then something important happened: In leaning too hard into white identity politics — and perhaps being too focused on what he thought Reagan Democrats wanted — Trump accelerated the rise of a new voting bloc that is, in many ways, the mirror image of the Reagan Democrats.

Call them the Biden Republicans.”

**Trip Gabriel: Republicans Won Blue-Collar Votes. They’re Not Offering Much in Return.** (The New York Times)

“It’s possible that Republicans who are not prioritizing economic issues are accurately reading their base. A survey last month by the G.O.P. pollster Echelon Insights found that the top concerns of Republican voters were mainly cultural ones: illegal immigration, lack of support for the police, high taxes and “liberal bias in mainstream media.”

The 2020 election continued a long-term trend in which the parties have essentially swapped voters, with Republicans gaining with white blue-collar workers, while white suburbanites with college degrees moved toward the Democrats. The idea of “Sam’s Club conservatives,” which was floated about 15 years ago by former Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota, recognized a constituency of populist Republicans who favored a higher minimum wage and government help for struggling families.”

**Perry Bacon Jr.: Why Republicans Don’t Fear An Electoral Backlash For Opposing Really Popular Parts Of Biden’s Agenda** (FiveThirtyEight)

“Republicans in the U.S. House last week unanimously opposed President Biden’s economic stimulus bill, even though polls show that the legislation is popular with the public. The U.S. Senate will consider the bill soon — and it looks like the overwhelming majority of Republicans in that chamber will oppose it as well. And it’s not just the stimulus. House Republicans also last week overwhelmingly opposed a bill to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. And the GOP seems poised to oppose upcoming Democratic bills to make it easier to vote and spend hundreds of billions to improve the nation’s infrastructure. All of those ideas are popular with the public, too.”

**Kaleigh Rogers and Geoffery Skelley: How Marjorie Taylor Greene Won, And Why Someone Like Her Can Win Again** (FiveThirtyEight)

“Eight others were running to be the Republican nominee in the state’s 14th Congressional District, one of the reddest in Georgia. During the primary, she posted an anti-Semitic tweet that Democratic megadonor George Soros, who is Jewish, was an “enemy of the people,” smirked through interviews about her Islamophobic social media posts, and used an AR-15 to obliterate a sign that read “socialism.” She won a runoff primary with 57 percent of the vote.

Ever since, she has been a source of controversy. Some of Greene’s most egregious social media posts, in which she endorsed QAnon, “liked” posts calling for the execution of prominent Democrats and questioned whether the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon ever happened, have pushed even some Republicans to denounce her. But those comments were public while she was running in that primary. So, why weren’t they an issue then? Or, to put a finer point on it, how did Greene get elected in the first place?”

**IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

## **Creative Optimizer**

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## **Digital Data**

### **Will Knight: Why a YouTube Chat About Chess Got Flagged for Hate Speech** (Wired)

“So he and Rupak Sarkar, an engineer at CMU, designed an experiment. They trained two versions of a language model called BERT, one using messages from the racist far-right website Stormfront and the other using data from Twitter. They then tested the algorithms on the text and comments from 8,818 chess videos and found them to be far from perfect. The algorithms flagged around 1 percent of transcripts or comments as hate speech. But more than 80 percent of those flagged were false positives—read in context, the language was not racist. “Without a human in the loop,” the pair say in their paper, “relying on off-the-shelf classifiers’ predictions on chess discussions can be misleading.”

### **Kaleigh Rogers: Why QAnon Has Attracted So Many White Evangelicals**(FiveThirtyEight)

“While we’re still learning about the demographics of QAnon believers, surveys that look at evangelicals’ other beliefs can help explain why they may be susceptible to falling down this particular rabbit hole. A majority of evangelical Christians identify as Republicans — 56 percent according to the Pew Research Center’s 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study — and they are more likely than Democrats and the general public to express belief in QAnon. In a Morning Consult survey from late January, 24 percent of Republicans said the QAnon conspiracy was at least “somewhat accurate,” compared with 19 percent of Democrats. Republican belief in the conspiracy dropped noticeably after the attack on the Capitol, as a series of surveys months before, immediately after, and several weeks after the attack showed, but Republicans remained more likely to support the belief than the general public (18 percent).”

### **Issie Lapowsky: The most engaging political news on Facebook? Far-right misinformation.** (Protocol)

“That finding was specific to the far right. In every other category — including far left, slightly left, center and slightly right — misinformation pages saw significantly less engagement than non-misinformation pages of the same political slant.

The research casts doubt on Facebook's efforts to limit the spread of election misinformation leading up to Election Day in November and in the aftermath of the January attack on the U.S. Capitol. Far from a barrier to engagement, the researchers wrote, "Being a consistent spreader of far-right misinformation appears to confer a significant advantage."

### **Anthony Halpin: The Workplace Revolution Coming to You** (Bloomberg)

“The work-from-home revolution spurred by Covid-19 lockdowns has reshaped the daily lives of millions of people. Now interest in a four-day week is gaining momentum.

The benefits to employees of a shorter workweek (with no reduced pay) are obvious, but not everyone is convinced. Skeptics argue it damages productivity for companies and countries facing intense competition from fast-growing rivals in Asia. Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma famously extols China’s “996” culture of 9am-9pm workdays six days a week.”

## Polling & Public Attitudes

**Kevin Collins: How much more accurate is a poll from a firm rated A+ by @FiveThirtyEight relative to a poll from a firm rated D- or one that is unrated?**

**Besheer Mohamed, Kiana Cox, Jeff Diamant and Claire Gecewicz: Faith Among Black Americans** (Pew Research Center)

“The survey indicates that Black congregations are distinctive in numerous ways beyond just their racial makeup. Sermons are a prime example: Black Americans who attend Black Protestant churches are more likely to say they hear messages from the pulpit about certain topics – such as race relations and criminal justice reform – than are Black Protestant churchgoers who attend multiracial, White or other race churches. And Protestants who go to Black congregations are somewhat less likely than others to have recently heard a sermon, lecture or group discussion about abortion.”

## Coronavirus

**Mary Williams Walsh: Virus Did Not Bring Financial Rout That Many States Feared** (The New York Times)

“As it turns out, new data shows that a year after the pandemic wrought economic devastation around the country, forcing states to revise their revenue forecasts and prepare for the worst, for many the worst didn’t come. One big reason: \$600-a-week federal supplements that allowed people to keep spending — and states to keep collecting sales tax revenue — even when they were jobless, along with the usual state unemployment benefits.

By some measures, the states ended up collecting nearly as much revenue in 2020 as they did in 2019. A J.P. Morgan survey called 2020 “virtually flat” with 2019, based on the 47 states that report their tax revenues every month, or all except Alaska, Oregon and Wyoming.”

**Nick Bartzokas, Mika Gröndahl, Karthik Patanjali, Miles Peyton, Bedel Saget and Umi Syam: Why Opening Windows Is a Key to Reopening Schools** (The New York Times)

“The C.D.C. is urging communities to reopen schools as quickly as possible, but parents and teachers have raised questions about the quality of ventilation available in public school classrooms to protect against the coronavirus.

We worked with a leading engineering firm and experts specializing in buildings systems to better understand the simple steps schools can take to reduce exposure in the classroom.”

**John Burn-Murdoch: Vaccine effect clearer every day in the UK. Amazing how much faster hospital admissions & deaths are falling in older groups than younger.**

**Julia Wolfe and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux: How Fast Is The Economy Recovering?** (FiveThirtyEight)

"Some sectors have been able to adjust (more or less) to the realities of the pandemic, but others, like leisure and hospitality and education and health services, have left their workers in a painful no-win situation. They face precarious employment, with temporary furloughs or permanent layoffs always on the horizon, plus the unenviable prospect of going to work every day with the risk of infection hanging over their heads."

**Julia Janicki and Simon Scarr: Bats and the Origin of Outbreaks**(Reuters Graphics)

“Scientists have long suspected that the rate of new infectious diseases could accelerate, especially in developing countries where human and animal interaction is increasing.

Changes in the environment are driving displaced species of animals into new habitats, allowing them to mix with other species or potential hosts.

Those shifts, combined with greater human interaction with animals as people move deeper into forests, increases the chances of a virulent virus jumping species.

This kind of spillover, when a pathogen in one species could start circulating in another and potentially create a new disease – is what appears to have happened in China with the virus that causes COVID-19. Like many infectious viruses introduced this way, the outbreak started with bats.”